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[title page]

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IV. THE PLACE OF THE KHASI IN THE WORLD.

By

David Roy

131 The Khasi country lies in the hills of the pro-
[64] vince of Assam in North East India. Khasi clans
[61] are exogamous and matrilocal, and the Khasis speak a
[197] MonKhmer language.

121 In speaking of the place of the Khasi in the world I intend to explain the Khasi's own view of his relation to other peoples of the world.*

829 The Khasi is very conscious of his importance. He says a Khasi claims to be the centre of the world. The Khasi has acquired such a feeling of self-importance from his great confidence in himself; and this confidence he has derived from the position in which his relationship-terminology represents him as standing with respect to himself and the world around him. Or, rather, his relationship terms and language are an expression of his attitude and notions.

601 The Khasi says—*Ka Kmie* (mother)

U Khun (son) — *Ka Kmie* (mother)

Which is to—His mother

Himself (male) — His sister (female)

He calls this the family. Then he says—

Ka Kmie Kha (Father's mother)

U Kpa Kha (Father, Father's brother) (male) — *Ka Pia Kha* Father Father's sister (female)

[114] * The writer of this article is himself a Khasi (Christian).

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He calls this the world. So a Khasi places his family on one side :— 601

Ka Kmie	*U Khun*	*Ka Kmie*
(Mother)	(Son)	(Mother)

which consists of his mother, himself, his sister, and, the world on the other side :—

Ka Kmie Kha	*U Kpa,*	*Ka Nia Kha*
(His father's mother.)	*U Kpa Kha* (Father, brother)	(His father's sister)

But he places himself again between that family and that world, and claims again :—

Ka Nia Kha	*U Khun Kha*	*Ka Bakha*
(Father's sister.)	(Father's son) (Himself.)	(Father's sister's daughter)

Thus he brings it nearer to himself and claims again :—

Ka Kmie Kha Ka u		*Ka Pura Kha*
(Father's mother)	(u Khun Kha) (Himself, Father's son.)	(Father's brother's daughter.)

Thus in the family—He stands between the mother and his sister ;—and outside in the world—His father—stands between his (the father's) mother and his (the father's) sister.

Thus in the world the Khasi stands between 602
his mother and his sister, and between his father's mother and father's sister.

This happens when on the death of his uncle he stands between, and on behalf of, his sister and mother; and, on the death of his father, he stands between, and on behalf of, his father's sister and his father's sister's daughter.

On the death of his father's younger or elder brother he stands between, and, on behalf of, his father's mother and his father's brother's daughter.

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827 The Khasi's interpretation of his life is this,—'long jaid na ka kynthei,' i.e., from woman sprang the kind, or species; 'U kha uba ai ka rynieng,' i.e., it is the father who gives the stature or person. Thus, the mother produces the kind or species, and this kind 'ka jaid' springs and remains in the man's own house ('ha laing') by his mother, and is continued by his sister and his niece, sister's child. 828 The stature or person, is produced, crystallised and is endowed with power and fortune, that is, with power to resist forces which affect a man's capacity to grow in power and in fortune, by his father, father's younger brother and father's elder brother, and by the father's nephews.

602 935 Thus the Khasi says all those who spring from the same womb are his kind, '*jaid-u sang*'; that is, they are forbidden as 'sacred' because, he says, they are suckled of one and the same breast. They are 'sang jaid.'

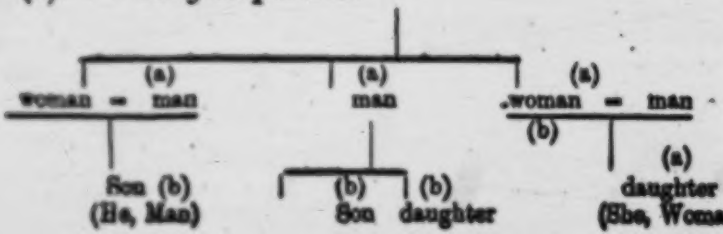
827 602 Again, he says, all who receive or derive retrospectively their stature from the common source which gives birth to man's body—*u sang*, that is, they are tabooed or are sacred as they come out or spring or are generated from one navel-string (umbilical cord), *u sohpet kha*. They are '*sang sohpet kha*.'

(a) = *Sang jaid*

Table Woman

(1)

(b) = *Sang sohpet kha.*



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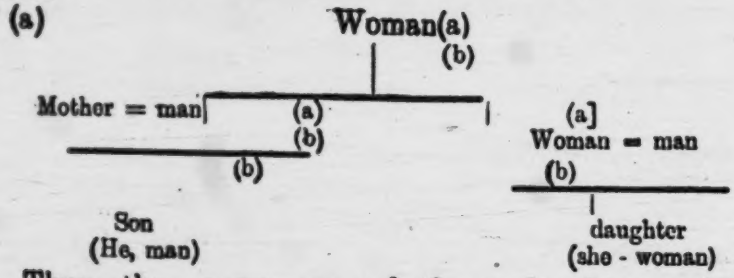
Thus the Khasi says, "I do not marry (and I cannot even think in this wise of) my own mother, my own sister. They are of the (a) group. I cannot think like that of my father's mother (kmie kha), father's sister (nia kha), father's brother (kpa kha), father's brother's children (para kha). They are of the (b) group." On his mother's side *u sang jaid*, that is, he is *sang* or forbidden as being of the same clan, kind, species. On his father's side *u sang sohpet kha*, that is, he is *sang*, forbidden as being of the same umbilical cord. 602 835

Then he finds only himself and his *bakha* (cousins, the children of his father's sister),—he being the son of a man born of one woman, and they the children of the sister of that person, born or whose 'statures' were generated from one man.

Table



Thus the *a* woman and the *a* daughter and all those between these two and those after these two, join to the *a* woman in life through the two primary stages of life in its essence when it was sustained through the umbilical cord and later by the woman's breasts. [827]

So the *a* woman and the *b* son and all those between the two and those after these two,

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602 join to the *a* woman in life through only one of the primary stages in the life essence when it was sustained through the umbilical cord.

Thus the connection of the *a* group is sustained to a much longer period and greater intensity in its life-formation to the *a* woman, than the *b* son.

Hence we have the double means of sustenace of life producing, through the umbilical cord and the breast, the single group *a*, while the single connection of life-formation through the umbilical cord produces a double a+b man-woman connection with the *b* son.

Thus he stands alone in the centre and he places his *jain na ka kpoh* (the kind which springs from the same womb), that is, those of (a) group (see tables) on one side, and he places his *kha* or those connected, or sprung of, the one umbilical cord, that is, those of (b) group on the other side. On the other side is *ka rynieng ka rngiew*, the 'stature', the person from which he also derives his. Then the Khasi calls the source (*thymmei*) from which he springs, *ko kur ka rngiew* (stature, person) *ki kha na uwei u sohpet* (those connected or sprung of one umbilical cord).

602 609 156 Thus the Khasi has his house of *ki kur ki jaid* the relatives of his kind and species, and his world of *ki kha ki man*, relatives of other people's kind and species with whom they are able to propagate human life.

[186] This interesting Khasi fabric of human relationship between man and his mother and father, of the connection between a man and his fellow-

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human beings all over the four quarters of the globe (*ehi snieh ka pyrthei*) with whom, in the world, he can give in marriage and take in marriage, shows the nature which is believed to be innate in the Khasi, and his supposed power of moulding the world. His nature is to grow and to resist, to extend and spread out. It is against his idea of life to remain narrow or limited and resourceless. He is not to be made small or made an orphan, it will not do for him and his idea of the world to '*sah khlem khun kelem kti*,' stay without kind and species, without child, without issue. A couple would even seek to separate if there are no children of the union. His idea is, so to say, 'imperialistic,' to sow and spread out. As I wrote elsewhere, "A Khasi marries men and women of all races; to his Khasi parent the issues are all one and the same without any distinction of caste or creed or colour or possessions. The children are the 'khun kha' (*khun* = child, *kha* = born, i.e. children who are born through the union of a descendant of the parent with a descendant of another parent), and these children are unified into families and are assimilated, in the Khasi idea of life, while these groups of families are traced to their mother and are made to revolve on this ancestress as the pivot of their existence."

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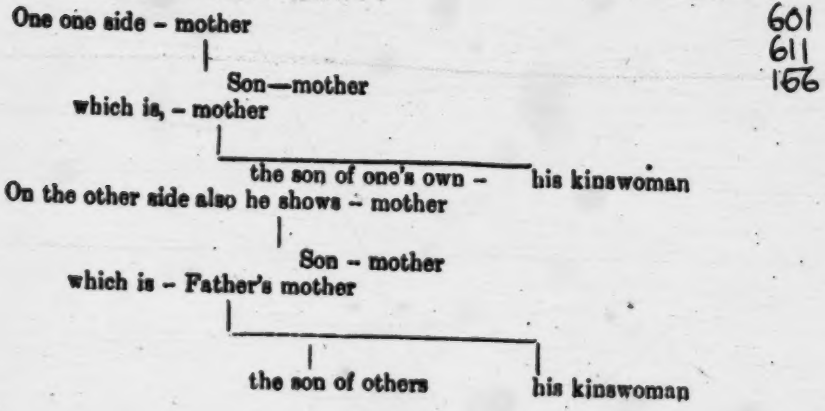
Thus the Khasi shows :—


One one side – mother
Son—mother
which is, – mother
the son of one's own –
his kinswoman
On the other side also he shows – mother
Son – mother
which is – Father's mother
the son of others
his kinswoman

601 611 166

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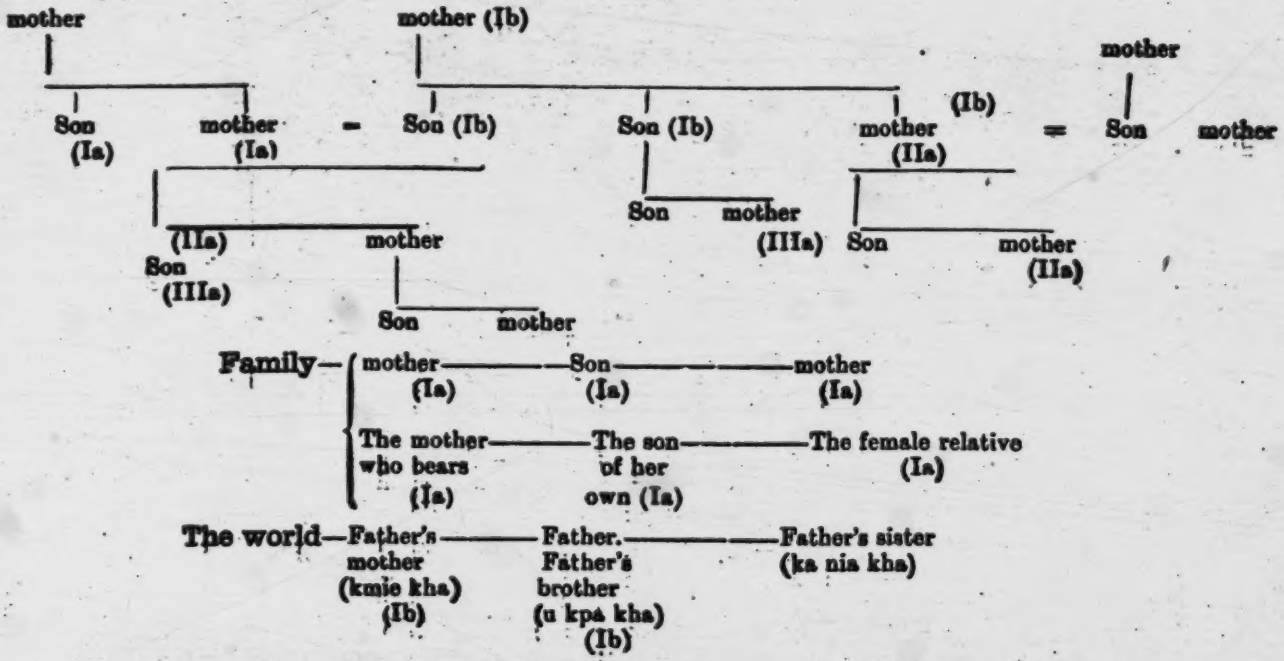
611

In their midst the Khasi places himself always as the son of the world, thus—

Table (3)



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For the species to increase and continue he says, Here—

The mother to bear and give birth—	—	The son of others	The aunt *ka nia kha* (father's sister)	Ia Ib

156
601
611

For the house to continue and the world to remain he says, Here—

The aunt *ka nia kha* (father's sister)	—	The son *u khun kha* (son of brother of ka nia kha)	The cousin *ka bakha* (daughter of *ka nia kha*) father's sister)	Ib IIa

For the person (*rngiew*) to crystalise, and the stature (rynieng) to remain he says, Here—

father's mother (*ka kmie kha*) —		The son *u khun kha* (son of brother of *ka nia kha*, who is grandson of *ka kmie kha* (father's mother)	The cousin *ka para kha* (daughter of father's brother)	Ib IIIa

The Khasi knows the 'sang' (*sacra*, sacred, that which is forbidden as sacred). He has experimented and therefore he says *ka sang iap* (*lit.*, that which is 'sacred' or forbidden or taboo unto death) in the case of those who committed incest in the same *jaid*, kind, species, that is, those of the *a* group. It is sacrilege. There is no greater punishment than for this sin,—a punishment so severe that the Khasi will not permit the bones of these transgressors to enter the family cairn. Similarly they regard as an act of sacrilege for children of brothers (*shi para kha*) to inter-marry. Thus the Khasi regards as 'sacred', that is, forbidden or tabooed, for those who are sprung of or connected through the same womb, and for those who are generated of and are suspended from or strung to one umbilical cord in origin, to marry. That is they regard as *sang* for the *a+b* man—woman group to marry the *b* son. [see Tables (1) & (2)].

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582 The Khasi knows the 'byrsieh'. The word *byr* means 'to appear', and, *sieh* means foul, thus *byrsieh* means to defile or corrupt; and *'tep'* means cover, *byrtep* means to cover, to spread over. Hence *ka byrsieh ka byrtep* means something which spreads over and makes everything foul, defiled and corrupt. Khasis regard marriage even in the case of cousins as not the right thing (*lit.*, not good), the *khun kha* (son of the son) that is the *b* son and his sister to give the seed to the house of his *kmie kha* (mother of the son, i.e. father's mother), that is, the house of the *a* group. Thus [824] no seed, e.g., seed of trees, rice, cucumber, pumkins, *shriw* or Job's tears, or millet, are taken from the children of the son by the family of the mother of that son, that is, no seed is taken from the children (*ki khun kha*) born of the son by his mother and sisters. Any seed given by these grand-children born of the brothers must be paid for if taken by his mother and sisters.

Thus Khasis do not consider that it is good for children of the brothers to marry the children of the sisters, though they are cousins, i.e. for III (a) to marry II(a). They believe that there will be misfortune and that they will not thrive. They consider it is better that the brother of II(a) marries the sister of III(a). In the case of these nearest cousins, however, they avoid such marriages so long as I (b), the father who is the uncle of II(a) is alive. [Table (3)]

Khasis do not consider it the right thing (regard it as 'bad') for the elder or younger brother of the wife to marry the elder or younger sister of

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the husband. Whichever side is *jem ka rwiang* (*lit.* whose person is less strong, less able to resist the evil) will suffer death. The word *rwiang* means more than literally 'fortune.' The word *rwiang* goes with *rngiew* and the two are coupled together as *ka Rngiew ka Rwiang*. *Rngiew* is the person, the man's 'ama'. *'Rwiang'* is the encircling power produced by that person, hence *jem ka rwiang* means the power encircling the man's person becoming easy of being conquered or subdued. (*Jem* = easy, pliable.)

In a word, the Khasi's idea of himself is that he stands in the middle of the world. We do not find terms in the languages of peoples with the family system to express varieties of relationship to the extent that we have in the Khasi vocabulary. Some of the other languages content themselves with terms for father, mother, uncle, aunt, cousin. They have no words to differentiate the classificatory-descriptive system of terms showing relationship with mother, mother's elder and younger sistere (*mei*, *mei san*, *mei nah*); father and his elder and younger brothers (*kpa*, *kpa san*, *kap nah*) and father's brother's children (*para kha*), father's mother (*mei kha*), mother's mother (*mei rad*,) wife's brother (*kynum*), husband's brother (*kong*), and so on. We find in the Khasi sociology, departments of social organization indicating the attitude towards life which is peculiar to the Khasi. The terms are not mere names but serve to show well-defined groups based on an idea of their special functions. As Dr. R. R. Marett says, "Exogamy, and everything

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else that we do is instinct with a *plus*; and for the student of religion or of human culture in any of its forms, to account for that *plus* is the sum and substance of his task.....Whereas, then, there is likelihood that any *a posteriori* reason existed for believing that in-breeding makes for sterility, if indeed it be true in fact at all, there might well have been an *a priori* conviction to much the same effect based simply on a fear that to tamper with the fountain-head of human vitality would somehow cause it to dry up." The Khasi stands in the world as exogamous in his rule of life, and he says '*sang bad byrsieh*', that is, endogamy is forbidden and if it should ever be committed it will render life defiled and corrupt. He says this out of the fear of the knowledge that any act of carelessness in the prohibited area of the source of human life and vitality, which is in the Khasi phrase '*long briw*' (*long* is to be or become, *briew* is man, i.e., to be or become man), will make that source of human life to dry up. So he says, 'duh I jaid I khong' (*duh*=is exterminated; *jaid*= kind, species; *khong*=root).

In refutation of such aspersions as that the Khasi has no rules of marriage, I shall quote the most sacred pronouncement the Khasi when two persons, the man and the woman, are initiated into that state. Calling upon the name of God the Khasi says—"*U Lei thaw briew man briw, u' Lei ne ka 'Lei synshar'*, (God who creates man and is the source of human life, God who keeps, controls, preserves), "*Hei ko Blei na jrong, Ko*

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Blei na tbian, ko Lei Synshar, Ko Blei triw, man briw, kumba la hukum kumba bhu ma phi U Blei ka Blei ban long I Kha I man, kumba la pynhiar ka synjat mynta ka sgni, ba phin tip, ba phin sngew na jrong ho kyndiang ba ita I jaid bad ita I jaid ki la iapoi kha poi man ban iaroi ban ia man ban ia heh ka long kynthei ka long shynrang', Oh God from above, oh God from below, Thou God who controllest, who keepest and preservest, Thou God who createst man and the origin and source of human life,—as ordained by Thee, Oh God, U Blei (God in the male aspect), Ka Blei (God in the female aspect) that there should be *I Kha* (person to bear and give birth) *I man* (person with whom and through whom to give cause to life and to grow), as token has been brought down this day, [a ring is given], so that Thou mayest hear clearly from above, that such and such *jaid* (kind, clan) and such and such a *jaid* (kind, clan) have become joined in marriage in order to increase, in order to grow, so as to increase the state of being female and the state of being male (i. e. male and female population)." [This is said as a woman of a certain clan always marries a man of a different clan.] As I have said elsewhere, "There is no tradition among the Khasis that there was ever a time when the status of marriage did not exist among our ancestors. There is a belief among the Khasis that they were instructed in their religion and that their ceremonies and rites were delivered by God Himself to the

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581 [773] *Hynniew Trep Hynniew Sknm* (the seven nests, seven roots). These seven nests or roots were seven pairs of virgin women and men created by God to marry and they formed seven houses (families) and from them the country was filled and the rites and ceremonies were obtained. Thus the Khasi takes pride in the fact that God Himself delivered their religion and the rites and ceremonies unto them. ... The Khasi matrilineal system has come down through ages and with a definite idea of the union of one man with one woman. This is significant for those who consider that marriage is and has always been common to the whole human race, and it raises the question as to whether the Khasi idea is the survival of a period when the nature of paternity was not understood".

[851] [603] [553] In the sacred rites of baptism of this simple folk we find that a Khasi grandmother will not officiate in the name-giving ceremony unless in the marriage of her son with the woman to whom the child is born there has been the regular ceremony of marriage.

/See category 116 for numerous native terms which are used and defined in this text. These have been marked for pertinent subject categories. -- Analyst/